

NSC BRIEFING

9 September 1958

BACKGROUND PIECE ON EAST GERMAN REFUGEES

- I. Refugees have fled from East Germany at a high rate during the past month probably because of new "hard-line" policies in education instituted by the Ulbricht regime, and because the populace is becoming convinced there is no hope for any real improvement in living conditions.
 - A. Flights to the West reached a peak during the eight days ending on 2 September when some 4,330 refugees fled to West Berlin. During roughly the same period more than 1,800 escaped over the interzonal border directly into West Germany.
 1. This brings the refugee total this year to more than 140,000; more than two million have fled since mid-1949.
 2. Although this total is below last year's 166,000 for the same period, it includes a larger proportion of essential brain workers--scientists, doctors, technicians and teachers.
 3. Moreover, the drain of military age youth continues; by 2 September more than 10,000 had escaped through West Berlin this year.

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B. By increasing security precautions along the interzonal border, the East Germans have had considerable success in reducing the refugee flow there. But they have been largely unsuccessful in preventing escapes through West Berlin.

1. The proportion of refugees coming through West Berlin has risen from less than 50 percent to more than 75 percent.

II. The East German government believes it cannot permit East Germany to "bleed to death from the refugee stream" but faces a quandary in trying to deal with the situation.

A. Party boss Walter Ulbricht is reported to have taken the problem to Khrushchev in recent days.

1. Ulbricht reportedly favors even harsher measures to control borders and travel, but apparently Moscow has restrained him from drastic action so far.

B. On the other hand, there is some evidence that the East German government may be considering relaxation of certain of the aggressive economic measures which lie at the root of popular discontent, although it is unlikely to make major political concessions.

C. But some East German party circles may believe that dissident elements should be allowed to escape to West, in order to avoid recurrence of such events as 17 June 1953 uprising.

III. Although the regime has not yet made a decision, preparations are under way which will make possible the imposition of tighter controls.

A. The East Germans are constructing facilities on the elevated line and outer railroad ring around Berlin which will eventually permit the interruption of elevated train service to West Berlin without warning.

B. A ban on rail travel to Berlin from stations within 50 kilometers of the city has been put into effect. Travelers reportedly must now secure police permission to go to the city.

IV. The heavy influx of refugees to West Berlin has caused a severe strain on reception facilities.

A. In response to appeals from Berlin authorities the West German cabinet directed that air evacuation of refugees from West Berlin be speeded up.

B. Bonn is considering requesting the western powers in Berlin give up or curtail their interrogation of incoming refugees to expedite processing.

C. The bottleneck in West Berlin is partly a result of the reluctance of some West German states to receive their refugee quotas because they lack adequate facilities.

- V. The refugee situation has been seized by all political parties in West Germany as an opportunity to direct world attention to the "German question."
- A. When the Bundestag reconvenes on 1 October for its traditional opening session in Berlin, leaders of the major parties are considering sponsoring a unanimous resolution emphasizing the injustice which forces the refugees to flee.
- B. A part of the West German press has demanded that Bonn bring the issue to the UN.